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FOR RELEASE

Sunday, May 30, 1982

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GIBSON ANNOUNCES COMPLETION OF NEWARK TOXIC WASTE CLEANUP

Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson announced today that two of the most dangerous toxic waste sites in Newark have been completely cleaned up.

The Mayor said nearly 600 drums of flammable, poisonous chemicals have been removed from an unused warehouse at 610 S. 13th St. and from a lot at 922 McCarter Highway.

The volatile materials were taken to a disposal site in upstate New York by a contractor working for the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The cleanup was arranged in cooperation with the city's Departments of Engineering, Fire and Law.

"This has been a long and difficult process," said the Mayor, "and we can all be relieved that it is over.

"These two areas had been identified a long time ago by city and state officials as the most perilous sites in Newark," Gibson continued. "But we had to campaign for nearly two years to get the state to take action, because its cleanup fund was depleted."

The Mayor noted that there had been 300 chemical drums in the warehouse, which is in a residential area and across the street from heavily used West Side Park. The other 280 drums were next to a major highway on the edge of downtown Newark.

"We are very fortunate that the state completed this process before there was any fire or injury from these lethal substances," the Mayor commented. "We hope the cooperation that has developed between city and state in these cases will enable us to get a faster response if any similar problems are found in the future."

Various city officials had sought state help in cleaning up the sites since early 1980. Gibson himself wrote to Jerry English, then commissioner of DEP, in November 1980, and met with her in January 1981 about the 13th Street warehouse. State officials later sent assurances that both sites were "high on our priority list," but insisted they could not act until the Spill Compensation Fund was replenished.

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City officials said the cleanup may cost the state nearly \$200,000. The wastes were transported to Model City, N.Y., near Niagara Falls. The warehouse was steam-cleaned to remove any contamination, and the McCarter Highway lot was excavated to remove dirt on which some of the rusted drums may have leaked.

Walter Janicek, an environmental specialist in the Newark Engineering Department, said the drums in the lot contained caustics, mercaptain, high viscous and flammable liquids, organic solvents and various chemical wastes. The property is owned by the Newark Stamp and Die Works, whose factory adjoins the lot, and the company had gone to court to try to force the city to remove the chemicals.

The dangerous drums were already at the site when the city foreclosed on the property in the 1970s for unpaid taxes. Newark Stamp and Die then bought the lot at a city auction in 1977, and became embroiled in a dispute with the city over responsibility for getting rid of the chemical wastes. The company sued the city, and last August a Superior Court judge ruled that the 1977 sale had been a "mutual mistake," and the land should revert to the city unless it could be cleaned up within a limited time.

John Vitale, assistant corporation counsel for Newark, said that although the cleanup is done, the city is pressing an appeal of the judge's ruling, so there will be no doubt about the validity of the sale to Newark Stamp and Die.

The other site cleaned up by the state is owned by Herman Wohl, and had been leased to Al Yablonsky at the time the chemicals were stored there. At one point in 1979 Yablonsky was jailed briefly for failing to pay for testing of the suspected hazardous waste. He has been the target of litigation by the city, but has reportedly left the state.

Janicek said the 13th Street warehouse contained solvents with high mercury content, flammables, corrosives, poisons and various chemical wastes. There was evidence that neighborhood children sometimes entered the building and played there.

The city officials said seven of the 12 sites listed as most hazardous by the state and city have now been cleaned. And Gibson concluded: "We are going to do everything possible to protect the public health and safety against those who consider Newark a dumping ground."